

Principal's End-of-Year Letter

June 9, 2020

Dear McKinley families,

This school year has certainly been a year we will never forget. One where we faced unexpected and unprecedented challenges, from a sudden school closure due to a life-threatening virus, to social and economic strife.

Despite these challenges the McKinley community shone through. Parents, staff and students came together and showed astounding flexibility, teamwork, and resilience. Seemingly overnight, parents became co-teachers at home, teachers transformed learning onto a digital platform, and students developed a whole new set of technological 21st century skills.

We also saw students' character and creativity blossom in beautiful ways. When students recognized that their friends, family, and community were in need due to the coronavirus, they stepped up to help make a difference. They applied what they have learned about the PRIDE philosophy in the real world, creating Global Citizenship Service Learning Projects to help others. At the Virtual Open House over 100 of these student projects were celebrated, and it was amazing to see the positive impact our students made.

Our students then continued their commitment to global citizenship when our own hometown saw peaceful protests, as well as looting, after the death of George Floyd. Our students at all grade levels came together with their classes at Community Meetings to support each other, listen, and talk about tough topics like race and inequality in an age appropriate way. Students brainstormed ideas for what they can do to take action and impact change. Some McKinley families went out to our neighborhood streets to exercise their right to peacefully march, and helped the community clean up local businesses. It is clear that our McKinley Lions will be social justice leaders to create a better future.

And this was just the last third of the school year! The closure didn't take away from all the other wonderful experiences we had this year, and it's important to take a moment and remember and celebrate all the other wonderful things that occurred, that already seem so long ago.

Students created the first ever student newspaper *The McKinley Times*. Fourth and fifth graders jumped into optional learning with Film Club, Student Council, and Green Team. There were exciting assemblies like BMX performers and jazz tap musicians, a Literacy Night with world renowned authors, a fun Family Art Night, an adorable Halloween Parade, spooky Haunted House and exciting Harvest Festival. Students bravely showed off their talent at Talent Show, and we had a magical Sing-a-Long show. There was delicious food and great performances at International Day. Students helped the environment during Bike it Walk it and Campus Beautification Days. We had a blast at the Jog-a-thon, and students shared their inquiry and exploration at the Virtual STEM Fair. Parents had a fun first ever Back to School Parent Night Out, the monthly Spanish Book Club, first ever and at full capacity Reflective Parenting Training, AASG Black History Month Community Mixer, and vibrant volunteerism with numerous committees and groups such as PTA, Room Parents, Site Governance, ELAC, AASG, SBC, Special Ed Resource Group and more.

Students participated in countless meaningful learning experiences that encouraged academic discourse and engagement and developed our young scholars. In addition to core subjects, they participated in

theater, art, music, STEM, PE, library, and garden to connect students to school and bring out their talents and interests. Also, this year social and emotional learning was deepened at McKinley more than ever before. Restorative Justice techniques were implemented, mindfulness was taught, Community Meetings were used for deep discussions, class buddies read character books based on subjects and characters reflective of our diversity at McKinley, and the social skills curriculum Second Step was newly utilized. In addition, for the first time ever all grade levels dove into comprehensive yearlong Deep Learning Global Citizenship Service Learning Projects to help the community and world in topics like kindness, the environment, bees, refugees, inclusion, and helping the homeless. Community organizations gave special presentations, students read thought provoking books, and had experiential hands-on learning. This hard work and commitment to teaching the Whole Child fostered students' ability to not only be successful with the sudden distance learning, but to be upstanders with strong character when their community needed them most.

McKinley also received special awards and recognition this school year. We were featured in a worldwide video by Edutopia as an exemplary school modeling social inclusion of students with special needs. McKinley was awarded a CA Honor Roll School. We were awarded a grant by the renowned educational foundation Cotsen to continue our effective work on Academic Discourse. McKinley earned schoolwide Digital Safety Certification from Common Sense Media. McKinley also stood out with state test and Dashboard scores as a leader in closing the achievement gap making impressive continuous gains over the last 3 years.

At McKinley challenges unite us and make us stronger, and bring out the best in our McKinley Lions. With each year my McKinley pride deepens, and I thank you for being part of our wonderful family. We could not do it without you.

Take care over the summer. I can't wait to see everyone soon.

Sincerely,



Dr. Ashley Benjamin
Principal